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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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ENGLISH MISSIONARY RECORDS AND THE HISTORY OF THE CANADIAN WEST

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THE STUDENT of the history of the Canadian West, particularly of the period following the entry of the West into confederation, is often handicapped by a scarcity of the letters and journals upon which the historian is accustomed to depend for the raw material of his work. For the period before confederation the vast and admirably organized archives of the Hudson's Bay Company are invaluable but after settlement began in real earnest, and particularly after the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Hudson's Bay Company's interests tended to shift northward and for the areas in which settlement took place the resources of its archives are comparatively slight. Some settlers wrote letters and kept diaries but relatively few seem to have found their way into public archives, national or provincial. The student is obliged to depend upon government documents, printed reports and newspapers and periodicals. These, although indispensable, lack the intimacy of more personal records and cannot always properly be regarded as primary sources.

A large body of primary material exists in the records of the various missionary societies active in western Canada which have their headquarters in England. Thanks to the grant of sabbatical leave from his university and generous assistance from the Social Science Research Council the writer was able to spend some time in the archives of several of these organizations. It was from the first evident that the bulk of the missionary records available in England made limitation imperative, and investigation was accordingly confined to the papers of the Anglican societies, as Anglican missions in the Canadian West were longest and most largely dependent on English societies for support. The records of the nonconformist societies have apparently been admirably preserved and must contain western material, but their western missions were quicker to attain self-support and were from the first more effectively supported by the parent bodies in eastern Canada than those of the Church of England. Accordingly their connection with the English nonconformist societies was not as close. Roman Catholic missions do not seem to have been to any extent dependent upon English support and therefore it is unlikely that a large body of material pertaining to them exists in the United Kingdom.

The three Anglican societies most active in the West were, in order of origin, the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the Church Missionary Society, and the Colonial and Continental Church Society, or, to use the common abbreviations, S.P.G., C.M.S. and Col. & Con. The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, founded in 1701 by the Reverend Thomas Bray, began its activities on the American continent shortly after its formation and its missionaries soon appeared in Canada. It was to the S.P.G. that the Hudson's Bay Company appealed for a missionary to the new colony on the Red River but the Society was unable to accede to the

Company's request and it was the Church Missionary Society that sent out the Reverend John West, the first Anglican priest to serve in Rupert's Land. The Church Missionary Society, founded in 1799, devoted itself especially to the conversion of the heathen. The white settlers overseas were the particular concern of the S.P.G. and the Colonial and Continental Church Society, originally organized to provide chaplains for isolated English congregations in Europe, worked in the same field. As time passed the societies came to represent varying shades of Anglican churchmanship, with the Colonial and Continental attracting the staunchest Evangelicals and S.P.G. offering a refuge for those who followed the Tractarians, although the older society always tried to avoid the accusation of extremism.

Of the three societies the records of S.P.G. offer most to the student of western Canadian settlement. Following its policy of devoting itself, as far as Canada was concerned, to the new settler, it left most of the Indian work to the Church Missionary Society, and its representatives were seldom far behind the pioneer. Its missionaries reported to the Society through their bishops and thus the papers of greatest interest fall into two main categories, the formal reports from individual mission fields, which give a detailed account of limited areas, and the less formal correspondence between the bishops and the General Secretary of the Society. As the bishops were usually on terms of acquaintance, if not always of friendship, with this important official, these letters are much more than formal reports and throw a vivid light upon the problems of the Church as well as upon the daily life and development of the west. There are also occasional letters from individual missionaries to officials of the Society but in most cases these are not of such interest as they are usually concerned with purely personal matters.

The missionaries supported by the S.P.G. in the Canadian West were a remarkable body of men, many of them able and well educated and almost all of them devoted to the cause for which they had found a vocation. As educated men plunged into what was usually a wholly strange environment, and as priests particularly concerned by the nature of their work with the state of the community around them, they are excellent witnesses to the course of the country's development. As strangers they could achieve a degree of objectivity, and although they had their own prejudices and preconceptions they stood to some extent outside the community they served. Thus their reporting has particular value to the student, although it must be admitted that occasionally their complete ignorance of conditions led them into obvious misunderstanding of what seems from other sources to be the true state of affairs.

The records of the S.P.G. are happily in an excellent state of preservation for its Westminster premises were spared war damage, although some of the documents have been injured by flooding. The Canadian papers, however, are very complete. Thanks to a grant from the Pilgrim Trust the Society was able to arrange its papers in such a way as to make them easily accessible and some of its particular treasures have enjoyed the skilled attention of the experts of the Record Office. The *Letters Received from Overseas* are arranged by year and by diocese, with the American dioceses grouped together, and thus a

particular topic, area or individual is easily pursued. These letters are the papers likely to be of greatest interest to the student of western Canadian history as they include the reports from missionaries and the letters from bishops already mentioned.

Copies of many of these papers are available in Canada and many letters and reports have been used in missionary publications. This publishing or copying has not, however, lessened the value of the original, for much of interest remains available only in the London archives. Often the copying seems to have been done with ecclesiastical matters, particularly missionary considerations, in mind. Few of the S.P.G.'s correspondents in Canada wielded a firmer pen than Acton Windeyer Sillitoe, first bishop of New Westminster, and many extracts from his letters appear in *The Mission Field*, the Society's publication. But the following description of the canning industry of British Columbia in its early stages found no place in its columns. The cannery in question was operated by William Ladner, "an enterprising Cornishman who combines the somewhat dissimilar trades of farming and the canning of salmon", at Trenant on the Fraser, twelve miles below New Westminster:

The cannery was occupied by Chinamen making cans for the salmon that, it is hoped, will arrive in August. (As it turns out they have *not* come, and most of the canneries are already 'shut down', with only half the usual supply.) The whole of the can-making is done by hand machines, and the division of labour is very remarkable, each can passing through a dozen pairs of hands in process of manufacture. All is done, however, with the utmost regularity, without confusion, and in perfect silence, one of 'John's' estimable characteristics being not to talk over his work At this cannery alone they were making 192,000 cans The salmon are caught by Indians with nets. On being brought to the cannery they are cleaned, and then chopped by a sort of guillotine of many blades into pieces the length of a can. The cans are then filled, and piled on a trolley which is run into a huge boiler and the whole door being shut, steam is applied through coils of iron tubing, and when it is known that this cooking process is prolonged through nearly three hours no one need be afraid of eating their salmon underdone. The whole business, from the manufacture of the cans to the packing of them occupies only about six weeks so that a man must needs combine some other calling with it.¹

The most prolific of the S.P.G.'s western Canadian correspondents was undoubtedly Robert Machray, second Bishop and first Archbishop of Rupert's Land and first Primate of All Canada. Despite his firmly held conviction to the contrary, Archbishop Machray was not always right but he was a great ecclesiastical statesman and a great educator who left his mark on the schools and colleges of the west and from the products of his far-ranging pen the student can descry the development of the region that Machray so loved and to which he gave so much. In his references incidental to church affairs one can follow the history of, among much else, the city of Winnipeg. In 1867 he wrote, "I expect ere long to be trying to build a Chapel at the little village of Winnipeg." St. John's, his cathedral, and St. James', both

¹ Archives of the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Westminster. S.P.G., Letters Received, Overseas. Bishop Sillitoe to Secretary, S.P.G., August 16, 1880.

established parishes, were too far away to serve the new community.² A few weeks later prospects for "the little gathering village of Winnipeg" were more definite³ and plans went ahead so fast that in the hurricane of 1868, one of the catastrophes that periodically overtook the Red River settlement, the new church was blown down.⁴ However it was soon set up again, for in 1869 one of Machray's clergy, the future Bishop Pinkham of Saskatchewan and Calgary, was married to a young lady, a Miss Drever, who played the harmonium in the new church, now dedicated to the Holy Trinity.⁵ In 1870 services were held there for the volunteers who hoped to keep order on the Red River.⁶ By 1874 Winnipeg was "a city of over 3000 inhabitants growing constantly and rapidly" and Holy Trinity church had become too small for its congregation, which was planning to raise \$10,000 for a new building.⁷ This new church was completed in 1876 and hoped to be self-supporting.⁸ In the following year Holy Trinity had not only achieved self-support but was paying its incumbent two thousand dollars a year and raising funds for an organ.⁹ By 1881, when Machray estimated Winnipeg's population at 12,000, Holy Trinity had bought a new site and was planning a stone and brick church to cost \$30,000. Its old site was so valuable, because of the real estate boom which Winnipeg had experienced, that the parishioners hoped its sale would go far to defray the cost of the new building. Plans were under way for Christ Church, with seating for seven hundred,¹⁰ and although in 1882 money was tight and interest at ten per cent,¹¹ Holy Trinity had the year before contributed \$800 to the support of a mission at Brandon.¹² By this time Winnipeg was growing more sophisticated, some of his flock were impatient with Machray's unrepentant Evangelicalism and in 1884 the newly opened Church of All Saints, "in the best residential locality", was looking for "a fair minded, moderate High Churchman".¹³

Some of the earlier letters from Rupert's Land cast interesting sidelights on the first Riel rising. Machray was fully aware of the difficulty of the situation in those "hard and uncomfortable times"

² S.P.G., Letters Received, Overseas. Rupert's Land. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, January 2, 1867. Abbreviated as S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld.

³ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, February 13, 1867.

⁴ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Montreal, August 31, 1868.

⁵ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, January 2, 1869.

⁶ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Manitoba, October 15, 1870.

⁷ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Manitoba, January 25, 1874.

⁸ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Bishop's Court, June 5, 1876.

⁹ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary S.P.G., April 21, 1877.

¹⁰ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Bishop's Court, January 29, 1881.

¹¹ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Bishop's Court, December 21, 1882.

¹² S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., July 9, 1881.

¹³ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Treasurer of Rupert's Land to Secretary, S.P.G., Winnipeg, May 2, 1884.

when "we never know what may be the calamity of tomorrow". He felt that the gravity of the situation was not appreciated at home. "The British Government and people seem to be deaf to the sound of our grievous troubles."¹⁴ A few weeks later things still remained "in a very bad condition. I doubt whether England ever in her history has allowed things to go as they have done here for the past six months. If she does not act in some way to ensure protection and order for her loyal subjects what is the meaning of her claim of Empire?"¹⁵ There was some division of opinion among the clergy of the Red River. Archdeacon Pinkham, whose father-in-law and brother-in-law had been arrested by Riel's party for assisting Dr. Schultz to escape,¹⁶ was evidently ready to fight it out with the French, but Machray saw such a course as leading to "indiscriminate ruin", especially as the English-speaking half-breeds had had nothing to do with the insurrection. He was himself reluctant to leave the settlement if his presence could help the situation, and his predecessor, Bishop Anderson, had advised him to postpone a proposed visit to England.¹⁷ During the later disturbances on the Saskatchewan in 1885 he was similarly critical of the Government.

The cause of this half-breed rising has been the continued procrastination of the Government in settling squatting and other claims to serious individual loss and general inconvenience. The Indians have not this excuse. Their attitude is very unexpected. I suspect it is simply owing to their starving and wretched condition. The government aid to them is doubtless a great help but it is not enough to maintain them What food the Government has given them has been given in rather a humiliating way — doled out as to paupers — and though that may be their description — yet the feeling of the tribe may be hard.¹⁸

Nothing was closer to Machray's heart than the Church's work in the field of education and especially in that of higher education. He made tireless efforts here to promote the influence of the Church and to strengthen and extend her educational institutions. He was not at all in sympathy with those who sought to secularize the Manitoba school system and he deplored the policies of the Greenaway Government as going much too far in that direction. His own political sympathies had been with the more or less Conservative administration headed by the Honourable John Norquay, a devoted Churchman and a close friend,¹⁹ and he feared, with some reason, that his beloved St. John's College might suffer in relation to the new plans for the University of Manitoba.²⁰

¹⁴ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, February 12, 1870.

¹⁵ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, April 16, 1870.

¹⁶ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. W. C. Pinkham to Secretary, S.P.G., St. James', January 28, 1870.

¹⁷ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Red River, June 21, 1870.

¹⁸ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Winnipeg, April 17, 1885.

¹⁹ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Bishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Winnipeg, April 14, 1890.

²⁰ S.P.G.L.R.(O) R.'s Ld. Archbishop Machray to Secretary, S.P.G., Winnipeg, December 29, 1903.

Although for the student of the history of the Canadian West in the period of settlement the records of S.P.G. hold the greatest interest, those of the Church Missionary Society offer much to the student of the history of missions generally as well as to anyone interested in the Indians of Canada and their relations with the whites. The Church Missionary Society's archives are in the process of arrangement and the Canadian materials so far available include, under the heading *North-West America (Rupert's Land Mission)*, the *Individual Letter Books* (outgoing) 1852-87, in two quarto volumes, the *Letter Books* (outgoing) 1821-82, in four folio volumes, the *Mission Books* (incoming) 1822-62, in six folio volumes, and for 1868-76, four folio volumes with separate sections at the back of each volume for the records of the North Pacific Mission. There are also fourteen boxes containing the *Original Letters, Journals and Papers* (incoming) 1822-80, for the North-West America Mission and two boxes for the North Pacific (British Columbia) Mission, 1857-80. The *Minute Books* of the Society and the printed *Proceedings* are also available. The *Mission Books*, perhaps the most interesting from the Canadian point of view, comprise original letters and journals from the mission field, indexed under the name of the writer or, in the case of papers, a descriptive title, e.g. *List of articles required for a new Missionary*.

Although of later origin than the other societies, the Colonial and Continental Church Society has a long record of activity in the Canadian West, beginning in 1852 with the formation of an Association by the incumbent of Headingley, Leeds, to support a "Headingley Missionary" in Rupert's Land. Unfortunately the "Col. & Con." suffered heavily in the blitz and most of its original papers, records and letters were destroyed. The printed *Annual Reports*, which go back to 1824, happily survived, together with the *Minute Books*, but even the bound volumes of the Society's publication, *The Greater Britain Messenger*, show some fire damage. *The Greater Britain Messenger* began publication as a quarterly in 1876 but apart from Numbers I — XXVI, April 1876, to January 1883, the series is broken until 1900. The loss is a sad one, for the Colonial and Continental Church Society supported, among many other missions, that to the Barr Colony at Lloydminster, and George Exton Lloyd was one of its missionaries. The extracts from his letters printed are enough to suggest how much more the original might have told us of that interesting experiment in colonization and one can only regret that the full records of this society no longer exist to complement the rich resources of its sister organizations for the study of the history of the Canadian West.

DISCUSSION

Professor Sissons said that church history had suffered because so many universities were state universities. It was a neglected subject and yet the student cannot understand people until he understands their religious history. This paper was a cheering sign. Very rich resources for some aspects of western church history such as the relation of the H. B. C. and the Reverend James Evans, and the story of the heroic Methodist missionaries in British Columbia were available. There was a considerable amount of information regarding British Columbia in the correspondence of the *Christian Guardian*. *W. N. Sage* said that the Anglican Church was just beginning to tackle the question of church history. The Methodists too were making a beginning. Both of them were however far behind the Roman Church in developing their historical material. With regard to the pioneer Methodists in British Columbia some work had been done at U. B. C. on the history of the Methodists prior to church union. He said that the history of Christianity was, however, more important than the history of denominations. He pointed out important questions for examination — such as the influence of Christianity generally in making the west. Church history was part of the social history of Canada and should be approached on a broad basis. *Reverend T. C. B. Boon* said that the Church of England was not unmindful of its historical liabilities. A collection of historical materials has been made by the Ecclesiastical Province of Ruperts Land, and will be turned over to the provincial library to be available for students. *F. G. Roe* said that an understanding of church history in the west must begin with a rejection of Ralph Connor. In his western novels Ralph Connor laid much stress upon the work of the Presbyterians to the exclusion of the Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Methodists.